

*Faithfulness in the Christian Ministry briefly  
represented and argued.*

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A  
S E R M O N,

Preach'd at the publick Ordination of

*Mr. Thomas Payne,*

A T

STRATFORD *by* Bow, *in the*  
*County of Essex,*

OCTOBER the 2d, 1729.

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By W. HARRIS, D.D.

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*Published at the Desire of the Ministers who  
were present.*

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A  
SERMON

PREACHED BY  
MR. THOMAS PAYNE,

AT  
STRATFORD BY BOW, in the  
County of Essex,

OCTOBER the 29. 1759.

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## I COR. IV. 2.

*Moreover it is required in Stewards  
that a Man be found faithful.*

**T**HE Apostle, in the close of the foregoing chapter, having reproved the factious and partial zeal among the Christians towards their respective leaders, for such a spirit so early appeared in the Christian church; comes in the beginning of this chapter to shew them, how ministers ought to be accounted and esteemed by them: *Let a man so account of us as* V. 1. *the ministers of Christ.* Not as masters of the house, but as the servants of Christ, employed by him, and serving under him; *and stewards of the mysteries of God.* We are servants, and not lords; but an higher order and kind of servants, like the stewards of a family, who have the direction

Coloss. i.  
26.

and care of all the affairs of it committed to them. Stewards of *the mysteries of God*; of the Gospel revelations and worship, or those discoveries of the divine will which were not known to the world before, and lie concealed from the rest of the world still, and perhaps are not fully discovered and made known yet; particularly the preaching the Gospel to the Gentile world, which the Apostle expressly calls, *The mystery hid from ages and generations.*

It was, no doubt, proper to the Apostles to receive the immediate revelations of the will of God, and to institute Gospel-ordinances, and they *only* are *Stewards* in the first and highest sense of the word; but as God has a standing household in the world, and appointed the proper officers of it, so, I suppose, the ministers of Christ may be fitly called, in a lower and subordinate sense, the *Stewards of the mysteries of God*, in proportion to their concernment in them, that is, in the ordinary work of preaching the Gospel, and administration of Gospel-ordinances, according to the revelations of the will of God by the Apostles.

Now in this character the Apostle here requires *faithfulness*, as what is peculiarly proper, and absolutely necessary; *Tis required of a Steward that he be found faithful.* I shall only undertake upon this occasion, and in a brief manner,

I. To

I. To represent this *faithfulness*, which is required in Gospel Ministers, under this consideration of them.

II. To consider the *Obligations* they are under to it, or how 'tis required of them.

I. Let us consider, what is this *faithfulness* which is required. 'Tis capable, in the general, of a double sense, according to the different use of the word in the New Testament.

§. I. The *faithful* is sometimes used to signify true *believers*, or those who heartily embrace the Christian doctrine; who *believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart*, and are brought, under the power of a full Persuasion, to an hearty surrender and subjection to him; to submit to his authority, and depend upon his blood; who hope to find acceptance with God and eternal life, through Christ, and in the way the Gospel prescribes, and (like the Apostle) to be found in him at last, not having his own righteousness which was of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Phil. iii. 9. In this sense the Apostle directs his Epistles, *To the faithful in Christ Jesus*: Eph. i. 5. And, *To the Saints and Faithful*, i. e. who made a profession, at least, of the faith of the



the Gospel. So ministers ought to be *Christians*, or true *believers*, in opposition to *infidels*, or *hypocrites*. And though, no doubt, the reality and sincerity of their faith is necessary to their acceptance with God, and not only the name and profession of it, as it is in every Christian's case; yet I think the credible profession and appearance of it is sufficient to qualify for their office, and render them capable of discharging it; as a credible uncontradicted profession suffices to entitle to church communion and christian fellowship; as we find it was, in both respects, in the case of *Judas*; and that for the same reason common to both cases, that men can only judge by what appears, and the judgment of the heart is reserved for God. I confess an unbeliever or hypocrite appearing such, would not be capable of the christian ministry, or like to be bless'd and owned in it, any more than he would be of the christian communion: It would be profanation in him to meddle with it, and prejudice and spoil the efficacy and vertue of it; for who would ever believe a man who appears not to believe himself; or be in good earnest, when he appears to trifle, and only act a part. This is certainly supposed here, though it is common to them with all the *household of faith*.

§. 2. *Faithfulness* is sometimes used to signify *fidelity*, or *trustiness*; faithfulness in the discharge of duty, as well as fitness for it. So the word is used in this case, where the Apostle speaks of the standing and ordinary ministry in the christian church, *The things which thou hast learned of me* <sup>2 Tim. ii.</sup> *among many witnesses, commit thou to faithful men, or trusty persons.* And so he speaks of himself; *He counted me faithful,* <sup>1 Tim. i.</sup> *putting me into the ministry.* <sup>12.</sup> This is the point I propose to consider, as the great comprehensive character of a Gospel minister. The Apostle describes *Tichicus* and *Epaphras* by this general character of a <sup>Coloss. i. 7.</sup> *faithful minister of Christ*: And while I am speaking of faithfulness, I presume it will be allowed me to speak agreeably to my subject, as well as character; to speak freely, and deal faithfully with you. I shall endeavour to form a distinct *idea* and conception of it out of the Scriptures, and represent it to you in the following particulars.

1. What is necessary in the first place, and fundamental to all the rest, is a strict regard to the *commission* we have received, and acting according to the trust reposed in us. We receive our *ministry of the* <sup>A. 22.</sup> *Lord*, according to the appointment of his <sup>24.</sup> word, and in the way in which he has prescribed: We have a *trust committed* to <sup>1 Tim. vi.</sup> *us,* <sup>20.</sup>

us, and must neither *take this honour to ourselves*, without a regular call from God, nor usurp an authority which don't belong to it; but consider ourselves as bounded and limited, as well as warranted to act, by a stated acknowledged rule. We must make this the reason and measure of all our administrations and claims; admitting those into the family of God, who appear to have a right by the Scripture rule, and not daring to keep any out, but those who have evidently no right by it. We must follow our instructions in every part of our work, and *teach men to observe only what Christ has commanded*; and be able to say concerning our use of the standing revelations of the Gospel, what the Apostle says of his immediate and extraordinary commission, *What I received of the Lord, I delivered also unto you.*

1 Cor. xi.

23.

xv. 3.

Heb. iii. 5.

In this sense *Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant*, as he declared the will of God to the Jews, and *observed the pattern shewed him in the mount*. He would be far from being accounted faithful, who acted in any point, as if he were master of the house, or lord of the inheritance, and not a servant and steward of it; or did not attend to the commission and instructions he received. 'Tis a great failure in faithfulness, when men pretend to speak any thing in the name of God, which he has  
not



not said, or enjoin any thing he has not required; or to lay either a less or greater weight upon any thing, than he himself has done. We must make no sins or duties, no truths or errors; but take the matter as it lies before us, and keep close to the instructions of his word. We must declare nothing but the will of Christ, and observe and enforce only the precepts and appointments of his law.

2. *Diligence* in our proper work, or the use of our best endeavours. He who improved his two talents, and made them other two, as well as he who improved five, was pronounced *faithful*. And the *good and faithful servant* stands opposed to the *wicked and slothful servant*. The A-<sup>Matt. xxv.</sup>postle requires, that we be not *slothful in*<sup>23.</sup>  
*business*, but *servent in spirit, serving the*<sup>Rom. xii.</sup>  
*Lord*; and says of himself, *Whom I serve*<sup>11.</sup>  
*with my spirit in the gospel of his Son*: Not  
only in the sincerity, but with the vigour  
of his soul. We must employ all our  
powers, and all our talents, in the service  
of our proper Lord, and improve all our  
advantages and helps: We must *wrap up*  
no talent in a *napkin*, or suffer it to lie *un-*  
*occupied*, but act with our full force, and  
according to our ability and gifts, of what-  
soever kind; how different soever from  
others, and to whatsoever special purposes  
they are peculiarly fit. The Apostle speak-

ing of *ministring* and *teaching*, requires it  
 Rom. xii. *be according as God hath dealt to every man*  
 3. 6. *the measure of faith; and as having gifts*  
*different according to the grace given to us.*  
 And again, *As every man hath received the*  
*gift, even so minister the same one to another,*  
*as good stewards of the manifold grace of*  
*God, i. e. of various kinds: So he explains*  
 1 Pet. iv. *himself; If any man speaks, let him speak*  
 11. *as the oracles of God; if any man minister,*  
*let him do it as of the ability which God*  
*giveth.*

We must spend our time and strength  
 in it, and give ourselves wholly up to it,  
 as the proper business and employment of  
 2 Cor. xii. *life. So the Apostle spent himself, and*  
 15. *was spent in the service of the churches;*  
*and labour'd more abundantly in it: And re-*  
 1 Ep. xv. *quires Timothy, Give thyself wholly to them;*  
 10. *and, Take heed to thyself and to thy doctrine,*  
 1 Ep. iv. 15. *continue in them; i. e. not mingling with*  
*other affairs, or being diverted with fo-*  
*reign engagements. So he says, No man*  
 2 Tim. ii. 4. *who warreth, entangleth himself with the*  
 3. *affairs of this life, that he may please him*  
*who hath chosen him to be a soldier, i. e. a*  
*good soldier of Jesus Christ. Faithfulness*  
*plainly carries in it the notion of industry*  
*and diligence, in opposition to idleness and*  
*careless neglect; in which sense the wise*  
 Prov. xviii *Man says, He who is slothful in his work,*  
 9. *is brother to him who is a great waster; and*  
 the

the Apostle speaks of *servants, not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity*: Idleness is a waste of time, and inconsistent with fidelity. Tit. ii. 10.

3. *Impartiality*, or an extensive care of all the parts of our work. A steward is never accounted faithful, who performs one part of his duty, and neglects another, or who notwithstanding his care in several things, is wholly careless of any part, tho' it be a single instance, and of lesser consequence; much more if it be of greater.

In this view of the case faithfulness will lead us to an impartial respect to all the divine appointments, and the whole compass of ministerial duty; not only to some parts, but to every part of it; not only the more easy, delightful, and honourable parts of our work, but to the more difficult, ungrateful, and hazardous ones. We must preach the word in all the doctrines and all the duties of it; administer the seals of the covenant, exercise discipline, in personal warning and reproofs, and publick censure upon just occasions. Our Lord commissioned the Apostles to *teach* Matt.  
*men to observe all things whatsoever he had* xxviii. 20.  
*commanded them*: i. e. all the precepts of duty laid down in the Gospel, as well as all the doctrines of faith, and institutions of worship. And we find the Apostles accordingly never wrote any Epistles to the



christian churches, without delivering at the same time the doctrines of the divine grace, and the personal and relative duties of the christian life, and reproving the sins and disorders which had crept in among them. The Apostle declares himself to the elders of *Ephesus*, concerning his personal ministry, *I have kept back nothing which*  
 Act. xx. 20. *was profitable to you ; I have not shunned to*  
 27. *declare to you all the counsel of God : I have*  
 35. *shewed you all things.* And he requires this  
 of *Timothy* ; *Do the work of an Evangelist,*  
 2Ep iv. 5. *make full proof of thy ministry ;* *ὡληροφύρη-*  
*σον*, fill it up with all the parts of proper  
 duty ; do the whole work of an evangeli-  
 cal minister, neglect no part of it.

'Tis a kind of unfaithfulness to confine ourselves to any particular part of the christian doctrine, how great and noble soever ; or to neglect any part of it, how little and remote soever ; or to make the christian scheme, a regular and lovely frame of truth, inconsistent with itself, or the several parts of it clash and interfere with one another. The reason is, that they are all enjoined by the same authority, and have each their proper place and use in the christian life.

4. *Simplicity* and uncorruptness. We must not corrupt the word or worship of God, by perverting them from their true meaning and design ; or mingling our own  
 fancies

fancies and opinions with them, much less our sinful passions and worldly interests. The Apostle rejoiced in the *testimony of his* 2 Cor. i. 12. *conscience to his simplicity and godly sincerity* in his whole course; and distinguishes himself from others by this character, *We are* ii. 17. *not as many who corrupt the word of God; like the false apostles and teachers among them, who corrupted the word of God: καπηλαδοιτες*, it signifies those who adulterated the wares they set to sale for their own gain; and were mere *bucksters* in religion, trading and trafficking in it for worldly advantage: on the contrary, *but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ Jesus.* He preached the doctrine of the gospel with sincerity of heart, and as it came from God, and as under his eye, without any deceit, or corrupt mixture. And again, *Not walking in craftiness,* iv. 17. *nor handling the word of God deceitfully, using any false and dishonest arts, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; representing it in its native simplicity, and upon the foot of divine authority, and as carrying its own evidence and weight to the mind of every man.* The Apostle was careful concerning them, *lest their minds should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ;* xi. 3. *from the pure institutions of divine worship, and pure doctrine of the gospel, as*  
laid

laid down by the Apostles, without the mixture of human inventions and private opinion; for he opposes it to the *preaching another Jesus, and receiving another spirit, and another gospel, than they had accepted or received from him.*

The Apostle Peter purges himself, and solemnly declares in the view of his dissolution, *For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the coming and power of Christ;* and he tells us, *That no Scripture is of private interpretation, i.e. of a man's own head, or according to his private and particular opinion; but it must be understood agreeably to other Scriptures, and to the sense of the Spirit of God, who inspir'd the whole.* And nothing bespeaks a greater irreverence of mind, or is more contrary to faithfulness, than *trifling with the word of God, and putting our own sense upon it, and which was never intended in it; for that is making it say what it never said, and speaking in the name of the Lord what never came into his mind, like those who prophesied lies in his name, and the deceit of their heart.* And in an age of so much error and private opinion, when the greatest truths of the gospel, as well as the gospel itself, is corrupted and denied, and the wildest fancies and opinions sometimes vented and advanced; a minister's faithfulness



fulness will very much lie in a great reverence for the word of God, and a close adherence to the plain and simple revelations of the divine will.

5. Plainness and Freedom, without fearing the persons of men, or baulking any necessary duty. The prophet *Isaiah* set his Face like a flint, in confidence of divine help; and God tells *Jeremiah*, *Thou shalt go to all that I send thee, and whatsoever I command thee that shalt thou speak; be not afraid of their faces.* He tells *Ezekiel*, *Thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, for they are a rebellious house.* We find the Apostle warning every man, as well as teaching them, and preaching the word with all boldness and confidence, with courage of mind, and without fear of offending any, how great and powerful forever. He used great plainness of speech, dealt freely with them, and without reserve, in what related to the gospel dispensation, and his ministry in it.

And accordingly he requires *Timothy*, to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. And as the Apostle himself was set for the defence of the Gospel, against all opposition, so he directs *Timothy*, In meekness instructing those who oppose themselves: Not with anger and wrath, or a rash and uncharitable heat, but with

a calm compoſure of the paſſions, and a kind and tender heart; deſigning their *edification*, and not their *deſtruction*. He directs *Titus* to the ſame purpoſe, when he ſpeaks of the *Elders to be ordained in every city, Holding faſt the faithful word, as he hath been taught; that he be able by ſound doctrine both to exhort and convince gainsayers; whoſe mouths muſt be ſtopped*: Not by any violence and reſtraint, for that is unſuitable to the genius of the Goſpel; and utterly unapt to reach its end; but by *all long-ſuffering, by meek inſtructing, by exhorting and convincing them by ſound doctrine*, i. e. repreſenting the matter in a clear and convincing light. This is the likeliſt means to be effectual, and the only method the Goſpel allows. He requires them afterward, to *rebuke them ſharply, that they may be found in the faith*; and to *rebuke with all authority*, i. e. with a ſeverity ſuitable to the importance of the matter, and becoming the character and office of a miniſter of Chriſt. 'Tis unfaithfulneſs to our truſt, and to the ſouls of men with whom we are concerned, to palliate matters, to qualify and ſoften real crimes, or betray any real truth; to be kept under awes and reſtraints, and deterr'd by the greatneſs of the perſons, or fear of inconvenience, from telling them their faults, or preſſing plain and unqueſtionable duty upon

upon them. This is to hold the truth from them in *unrighteousness*.

6. We must take all *opportunities*, and chuse the fittest seasons. This is mentioned as a point of faithfulness, as well as wisdom, in this case; *Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season, to provide for all the servants their appointed food at the proper time.* Our Lord himself, the *Apostle and high Priest of our profession*, who was faithful to him who appointed him, and was as a Son over his own house, took all opportunities which offered of preaching the word of the kingdom, and instilling his doctrine into the minds of men; and improved not only the solemn sabbaths, and temple worship, but every occasional opportunity, and ordinary occurrence of life. He scrupled no place or time of doing any kind of good. The apostle requires this of *Timothy*; *Preach the word, be instant in season, and out of season*, i. e. upon every proper call and occasion, not only on stated and appointed seasons, but occasional opportunities whensoever they offer.

We should be especially careful of the stated returns of solemn opportunities, and appointed seasons, which have been all along observed in the christian church,



and which God has remarkably owned and blessed : So we read, *The first day of the week the disciples were assembled together,* John xx. 19. *after our Lord's resurrection: And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow.* Acts xx. 7. But we should readily embrace every season which offers, and answer any call of Providence, to preach the Gospel, and perform the duties of our ministry, as far as we are able, and is consistent with our measures of bodily strength, and without interfering with other necessary duties. Besides that preaching the word *out of season*, in the sense of the Apostle, may be *speaking a word in season*, in the language of the Prophet. The dropping a proper instruction in conversation, for direction, encouragement, or reproof, when 'tis well timed, and wisely managed, may be of great use, especially under great distress of mind, or great affliction of life. Backwardness and unwillingness to any ministerial service, upon proper calls and opportunity, is unbecoming the faithfulness of a Steward of Christ.

7. We must *accommodate* ourselves to the different state and circumstances of the persons with whom we are concerned. The faithful steward gives to every one his *portion in due season*; i. e. suitable provision

to every one of the family, according to their state and condition in it. Our Lord not only delivered the christian law to his disciples in his sermon upon the mount, with the greatest exactness and spirituality, but spoke the most instructing and awakening things in his parables, to the ignorant and vicious Jews; and always treated in a different manner the meek and humble, who were teachable and willing, and the proud and prejudiced, and wordly minded.

So the Apostle directs *Timothy*, *study to* <sup>2 Tim. ii.</sup> *show thyself approved to God*; in the first <sup>15.</sup> place to approve himself to God, and then not to be disapproved by men: *A workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of God.* The word *ὀρθοτομεῖν* is either *sacrificial*, and alludes to the cutting off the several parts of the sacrifice, some of which were to be offered up, and some to be cast away; or the dividing the several parts of the sacrifice to each one, according to the direction of the law, and so it was *approving themselves to God*: Or else to the cutting out a strait path thro' a cross and difficult road, which properly belonged to *workmen*. The sense is, not only to divide the truth distinctly, with clearness and evidence and order, and separate and distinguish between truth and falshood; but to suit it to the several conditions of men, and

bring it down to their particular and special purpose and use.

So the Apostle speaks of the *weak* and the *strong* in the faith; and of *meat* for them of *full age*, and *milk* for the *unskilful* and *babes*. And the Apostle *John* writes respectively to *little children*, and to *fathers*, and to *young men*. We must consider the different capacities of men, and their different standing and attainments in the christian state; their circumstances and conditions of life, and the difficulties and discouragements in their way; and endeavour to speak a *word in season* to a *wearied soul*, to comfort the sad and sorrowful spirit, to *strengthen the feeble knees*, and *lift up the hands which hang down*. The Apostle requires to *warn the unruly*, *comfort the feeble-minded*, *support the weak*. And 'tis a defect in faithfulness to preach only general and speculative truths, which equally concern all, or are above the capacity of most; and not consult the state of the flock, and the circumstances of things; and rather please ourselves in the subject and management, than attend to what is most specially fit and suitable to their case.

8. *Steadiness* in times of danger. If we are called to trials and suffering for the *testimony of Jesus*, and the *word of his truth*, we must be faithful in that case, by steady adherence to the *truth of the gospel*,



*gospel, in the face of danger and opposition. None of the things which befall us must move us, and we must in nothing be terrified by our adversaries. We must not be soon shaken in mind, or fall from our steadfastness: i. e. not discouraged and disheartened in our work. The Apostle reasoned with the Philosophers and with the Jews, notwithstanding the great contradiction of the one, and the violent opposition of the other; and preached at Rome in his own hired house, with all confidence, with all freedom of speech and courage of heart: No man forbidding him, Providence so ordering the matter at this time, tho' in the midst of many adversaries. The Apostles run the risk of all dangers, and of their lives, in preaching and propagating the gospel in the world; and seeing they had obtained this ministry, as they had received mercy they fainted not.*

Acts xx.  
Phil. i. 28.  
2 Pet. iii.  
17.  
Acts  
xxviii. 31.  
2 Cor. iv.  
1.

We must shew our faithfulness to Christ in following the *Captain of our salvation*, and the standard of our Leader, wherever he goes. We must be content to *endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ Jesus*, and arm our selves with the same mind with our suffering Saviour. If we are not determined and resolved, we shall never be faithful, but either borne down by opposition, or discouraged by difficulties. He is unfaithful who deserts in the day

day of battle, and flies from the colours under which he is listed. Though we may suffer a present inconvenience, or be exposed to danger, we must notwithstanding be true to our trust, and not flinch for fear, or be disheartened by difficulties. We must be *stedfast and immoveable*, thro' all the trials of life, and *abound in the work of the Lord*, from the prospect of the future reward. Courage and boldness is always necessary to faithfulness in times of trial and circumstances of danger. A cowardly timorousness and fear of suffering betrays a weakness of mind, and will prove a snare at such a season. I only add as another notion of faithfulness, and which fills up, and compleats the account, *9. Constancy and pererverance to the end.* This is every where required, and made essential to faithfulness. Our Lord tells his disciples, when he sent them abroad to preach the Gospel, *If any man put his hand to the plow, and look back, he is not fit for the kingdom of God.* And he requires of the Angel of the church of Smyrna, *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,* and we must overcome and keep his word unto the end. The Apostle proposed this to himself, under the present exercises of life, as his great scope and aim; *None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that*

I

Luke ix.  
62.

Rev. ii.  
20.  
Rev. ii.  
16.

Acts xx.  
24.

*I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord. And he was able to say, in the close of life, and the views of death; I have fought 2 Tim. iv. a good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finished my course.*

A faithful steward then must continue such through the whole course of his service and trial, and hold the beginning of his confidence stedfast unto the end. If he fail at last, he will be reckoned unfaithful, notwithstanding the diligence and care of all his former life. Apostacy or drawing back will spoil all we have been doing, and render all in vain at last; that is, as to our selves, and any saving advantage by ~~it~~ though perhaps not altogether to others. They may receive benefit by our labours, when we perish and miscarry our selves: We may possibly save them who bear us, when we don't save our selves, and after we have preached to others, become cast-aways our selves, as the Apostle's expressions suppose. As long as our capacities of service are continued, and opportunities offered, we must be imployed in the service of our great Lord, and wait till our warfare is accomplished, and he give us a discharge. A minister devoted to the service of Christ, is like the servant under the law, who loved his master, and would not go out free; his ear



Exod. xxi. *was to be boar'd at the door post, and he was*  
 6. *to serve his master for ever.* Thus I have  
 endeavoured, as the limits prescribed me  
 will allow, to give a distinct view of *faith-*  
*fulness*, the great comprehensive character  
 of a steward of Christ.

II. I shall consider the *obligations* to faith-  
 fulness, and shew how 'tis *required* of a  
 steward that he must be faithful. I shall  
 represent and urge the obligations to it a  
 little briefly.

I. I argue from the nature of the *trust*,  
 or the work in which we are engaged, mi-  
 nisters are officers in the church of God,  
 and put in trust. They act under com-  
 mission by the christian character, and ac-  
 cording to the will of Christ; as stewards  
 are entrusted with the care of the family.

Acts xx. The Apostle speaks of the *ministry which*  
 24. *he had received of the Lord*; and of the  
 Colos. iv. *glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was*  
 17. *committed to his trust*; and he was ordain-  
 1 Tim. ii. *ed and appointed a preacher as well as an*  
 7. *Apostle*; though he received his extraordi-  
 2. Eph. i. *nary ministry in a more immediate and*  
 11. *extraordinary way.* He tells the elders of

Acts xx. *Ephesus, who were ordinary ministers, Take*  
 28. *heed to your selves and to the flock, over*  
*which the Holy Ghost hath made you over-*  
*seers*: He called them to their office and  
 work, by fitting and inclining them to it,  
 and

and placed them in their respective stations and posts of service. He tells Timothy, *The good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us: that is, the form of sound words which he had heard of him.* And he requires him, *The things which thou hast heard of me, commit thou to faithful men.* <sup>2. Tim. i. 14.</sup> <sup>2. Tim. ii. 2.</sup>

The standing ministry of the gospel are employed in this work by the authority and appointment of Christ; and according to the rule and directions of his word: They receive all their qualifications and furniture for it from him, are separated and set apart to it by the gospel rule, and are fixed in their several posts of service by the disposal of his will. 'Tis an honourable trust, when they are *counted faithful, and put into the ministry*, and are made stewards of the family and household of God, and have the concerns of his interest and honour in the world put into their hands. 'Tis a work of great difficulty, it consists of various parts, and requires great intention of mind. Ministers are not only to be *examples* and guides of the flock, but are like officers and *standard bearers* in an army, who stand in the front of the battle, and are the great mark of envy and opposition. And there is often great difficulty from within, as well as from without, from the weakness and disorder of their own minds, and the diversion and

entanglement of other things: So the Apostle *served the Lord with many tears and temptations*, and had *great conflicts* in his own mind. And 'tis an important trust upon which the greatest matters depend, and which has the most awful consequences attending it, *For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them who are saved, and in them who perish: To the one we are a savour of death unto death; and unto the other, a savour of life unto life.* Saving or perishing, life or death, are the unavoidable consequences of the gospel ministry wherever it comes, and is duly dispensed.

2 Cor. ii.  
17.

We must consider our selves as *trustees*, and acting by appointment and direction. If we are not faithful, we alter the nature of our service, and act counter to the design of our office, which is a trust committed to us of the Lord. If we set up for *dominion over your faith*, and *lords of the heritage*, or are negligent and deceitful in our work; if we assume an authority which don't belong to us, or are careless of the duty which is incumbent on us; we equally offend, and either usurp the rights of Christ, or betray our own trust. What can be a greater inducement to faithfulness than the nature of our service, as a weighty and an honourable trust; and the moment and consequences of it to the souls of men.

2. I argue farther from the *engagements* under



under which we lie. We are under the same engagements with other Christians, as we are devoted to God in our baptism, and listed in the service of Christ. The Lord's supper is a renewal of our baptismal covenant, and an additional bond and tie to faithfulness. All the experience we have of divine mercy, and all our professions of respect to him, are common to us with other Christians; and the greatest of their kind. But ministers are especially devoted to Christ, and obliged to faithfulness, as they stand in a nearer relation to him, and are more highly entrusted than other men: They are peculiarly set apart to his use, and under the obligation of a formal solemn dedication to him. Tho' every servant in the family is obliged to be faithful in his proper place, yet the steward of the family, who is entrusted with the care of all the rest, is peculiarly obliged, and more than any other. The consequence is, that unfaithfulness in us would be the greatest perfidiousness, and breaking thro' the strongest ties, and peculiarly aggravated, and more than that of other men. To this purpose 'tis observable, that the Apostle puts *Timothy* in remembrance, *Not* <sup>1 Tim. iv.</sup> *to neglect the gift which was in him, and to* <sup>14.</sup> *stir up the gift of God which was in him,* from the consideration of the *Laying on* <sup>2 Ep. i.</sup> *his hands, and the hands of the presbytery.* <sup>6.</sup> He excites his attention and regard from the

consideration of his ordination, or solemn separation to his work and office. It adds further force to the argument if you consider,

3. The great *assurances* and encouragements which are afforded and promised. We serve a good Master and gracious Lord, tho' we are engaged in a great and difficult work. If we have reason to say, from a just apprehension of the awful service, *who is sufficient for these things?* yet blessed be God we are not destitute of answerable help; for *our sufficiency is of God,* and *his grace is sufficient for us.* We are not left to grapple with difficulties alone, or to contend in the christian or ministerial warfare, in our own strength.

Our Lord has promised to be *in the midst of his disciples, when they are met together in his name*; i. e. for publick worship; and *to be with them always even to the end of the world*, in preaching and baptizing. He is always ready to assist and support them in his service: We are *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*; and *strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus.* The Apostle says, *I thank Christ Jesus my Lord who hath enabled me, counting me faithful, and putting me into the ministry*: He will enable those he counts faithful in the work of the ministry: Tho' he is ascended to heaven, he has *all power in heaven and earth*, and is present with them by his Spirit,

1 Tim. i.

13.

rit, who *abides with them for ever, and dwells in them*, and is to guide and direct, to strengthen and comfort them in all the difficulties and trials of their present service. And what may we not hope to do, when we are thus supported, and with such succour and aid?

Besides, they are entitled to peculiar respects from men. The Apostle requires the Christians, *To know them who labour among them, and are over them in the Lord*, <sup>1 Thess. v. 12.</sup> and to *esteem them very highly in love for their work sake*. And again, *Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine*. <sup>1 Tim. v. 17.</sup> He lays down this as a standing law in the christian churches; *So hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live by the gospel*; <sup>1 Cor. ix. 14.</sup> And let him who *is taught the word, communicate unto him who teacheth in all good things*. <sup>Gal. vi. 6.</sup> There is the double honour of respect and maintenance, not by courtesy and kindness, but by the appointment and will of Christ. And why are we to be esteemed and supported, if we are not to be faithful? Are we to be kept in idleness, and neglect of proper service, as useless drones, who only fatten upon the spoils of others bounty, and keep out faithful labourers in the vineyard? No, unfaithfulness forfeits all regards; for 'tis required only to them who *rule well, and labour*.



*labour in the word and doctrine, and not only wear a name, and bear a character upon them.*

And 'tis not the least encouragement, that they have the present comfort of their own *sincerity*, and the sense of the divine acceptance and approbation. *This*  
 1 Cor. i. 12. *is our rejoicing, says the Apostle, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you wards.* 'Tis an unspeakable consolation to a faithful minister, that the promise of acceptance is made to faithfulness, and not success; We learn this in the instance of  
 Isa. xlix. 4. *the prophet, Then I said I have labour'd in vain, and spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.* And  
 1 Cor. ii. 15. *in that of the Apostle, We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, i. e. acceptable to God thro' Christ, in them who are saved, and in them who perish too.* And how powerful a reason to faithfulness may be derived from hence, that they are secure of the presence and strength of Christ, and present encouragement and comfort, in all the parts of their service, and all the difficulties which attend it?

4. I argue especially from the *final account*. Every steward is always accountable to his proper master and lord, as he is  
 Mat. xxv. 19. *entrusted by him. The Lord of the servants will*

*will come and reckon with them, and it will be quickly said to every one of us, Give* <sup>Luke xvi. 2.</sup> *an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.* Let us consider a

little the account we must give of ourselves, and how it will fare with us at last.

If we have not been faithful, what account shall we be able to give? How shall

we lift up our guilty heads? Where shall we fly for refuge? What shall we have to

say for ourselves? Why, we shall either stand *speechless*, and be struck dumb, or

have only vain pretences and idle shifts. We shall not give our account with joy, but

*with grief*, and be covered with shame and <sup>Heb. xiii. 17.</sup> confusion, under the sense of unfaithfulness and neglect.

We shall be condemned by the sentence of our own minds, as well

as by that of the merciful Redeemer, and righteous Judge of the world; and be

doomed to a double vengeance and eternal misery. *He who knew his Lord's will, and*

*did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes,* and that will be in proportion to his know-

ledge. In vain shall we say at the last day, *Lord, we have prophesied in thy name;* when

he will profess, *I never knew you, depart from me ye who work iniquity.* The most sacred character, and the highest profession

will be no cover for unfaithfulness, or protection from the *wrath of the Lamb.* Read

the unfaithful servant's doom from the mouth of the Judge, *Thou wicked and*

*slothful* <sup>Matt. xxv. 28.</sup>

*slothful servant, thou oughtest to have put out my money to the exchangers, i. e. made a proper improvement of the talents he had received; take therefore the talent from him, cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; i. e. strip him of all he was entrusted with, cast him into a state of misery, of the deepest anguish, and utter despair. If they who preach to others, become cast-aways, they will be cast into the blackest darkness, and hottest hell: The burning fiery furnace will be heated seven times more for the punishment of a wicked prophet. If they don't save themselves, as well as those who hear them, they will perish with the greatest reproach of their own minds, and the highest resentment of his. No kind of men sin with greater aggravation, or will meet with a juster severity at last, than wicked and unfaithful ministers; who were placed in so high a trust, and under so great engagements and encouragements to faithfulness.*

But now on the other hand; if we have been faithful, we shall be acquitted and approved by our proper Lord: So I understand the Apostle in those peculiar words, *Tho' I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he who judgeth me is the Lord: i. e. Tho' I am not conscious to myself of remarkable failings, or insincerity of heart, why I should be censured and condemned*

1 Cor. iv. 4



condemned by you; yet my own judgment don't determine the case, that is not the final sentence: I must be judged by my proper Lord; 'tis he must acquit and approve me. And accordingly we find that he will publickly approve and reward the faithful servant. He will say, *Well done good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many: Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* Every faithful soul will be rewarded, but it will be in proportion to the degree of their faithfulness. There is a higher and peculiar glory promised to faithful ministers; a double honour in the next world, as well as this. *The righteous Judge will give them a crown of righteousness,* and to them who are *faithful to death, he will give a crown of life:* And the Apostle tells the elders of the churches, *When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away: A bright unfading crown, a mark of distinguishing honour and reward.* And the Prophet says, *They who are wise, i. e. wise to win souls, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they who turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.* And as one star differeth from another star in glory, they will appear as stars of the first magnitude in the kingdom of Heaven; and move in a higher orb, and shine with a brighter glory. He who holds the

Matt. xxv. 21.  
1 Pet. iv.  
Dan. xii. 3.  
stars

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Rev. i. 16. *stars in his right hand will make them pil-*  
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You see what is the *faithfulness* required,  
 and what are the *obligations* to it; let me  
 only in the close drop a few suggestions by  
 way of direction, and in order to faithfulness.  
 For example, *watchfulness* is requisite  
 under the disadvantage of present weakness  
 and surrounding snares; *But watch thou*  
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*reward, to direct your measures and aims, and animate your minds in all your pursuits: Be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as you know that your labour in the Lord shall not be in vain.*

I conclude all with a word of advice to the *people*, particularly to you of this *congregation*. If you have a faithful minister among you, value the privilege and blessing; attend him with a constant seriousness and care: Be obedient to his message and rule: Comply with the word in his mouth, and the ordinances of the gospel, in his administration of them: *They who labour among you are over you in the Lord*, i. e. in the things of the Lord, and in subjection to him. The members of the household are under the care of the steward, tho' by the master's appointment and direction; and it would breed great disorder in a family, if the servants are unruly, and dissatisfied with the steward's provision and care. Faithfulness in them requires, not a blind an implicit indeed, but an answerable subjection and duty in you, and an answerable esteem and support. So will the order of God's house be preserved, and the work of the Lord revive and prosper among you; the heart of your minister be encouraged and strengthened in the difficulties of his service, and your souls flourish in all your attendances upon it: Which God grant may be your case, for the sake of Christ, the Lord and Head of the Church, *Amen.*

F I N I S,



